

DCI/IC 76-0155

29 July 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : [REDACTED]
Deputy to the DCI for the Intelligence Community

25X1A

SUBJECT : Bradsher Article on the Backfire Bomber

Sir:

You mentioned at the morning meeting that you plan to discuss subject article with the President. The attached memorandum was prepared by the DDI. We have also checked with the DIA and NSA and they have assured us that they have come upon no information which suggests that the Backfires have ever flown to or towards the Azores.

General Wilson did note that we have tracked the Backfires flying towards the arctic in a profile which demonstrated an operational radius of 2,000 nautical miles. CIA has no information to suggest that this is factual. The best they can do is extrapolate information into an operational range of around 1,500 miles.

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Attachment
As stated above

Distribution:

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*P.S. Same now
agrees with
CIA on flights
of abt 1400 NM.*

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AD/DCI/IC/JNM McMahon: [REDACTED]
CL BY 059687

[REDACTED]

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July 28, 1976

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Bradsher Article on Soviet Backfire Bomber

1. Today's *Washington Star* carries an article on the Soviet Backfire bomber by *Star* staff writer Henry Bradsher. Bradsher claims that, according to military sources, Backfires have "begun appearing over the mid-Atlantic near the Azores Islands on reconnaissance flights from bases near Murmansk."

2. Bradsher is totally incorrect. Backfire bombers have never operated over the Atlantic Ocean. The operational radius of the Soviet bomber apparently is not great enough to permit a flight to and from the Azores unless it receives in-flight refueling. Bradsher claims that the Backfire receives one in-flight refueling enroute to the Azores, but refueling operations with the bomber were noted only during flight testing several years ago--and have not been seen with the naval Backfires. The distance around Norway from the Kola Peninsula to the Azores is just under 3,000 nautical miles. CIA's current--and still tentative--estimates of Backfire's unrefueled operational radius is between 1,700 and 2,300 nautical miles.

3. Further, Backfires are not--as the article implies--permanently based on the Kola Peninsula. Twice during the past year, the Soviets have temporarily sent naval Backfire aircraft from their base near the Black Sea to the Kola Peninsula, from which they conducted operations over the Barents Sea. These bombers then returned to their home base. Recently, some naval Backfires have been sent to a base in the Baltic area, possibly on a permanent basis, but these aircraft have not yet conducted any over-water flights.

NOTE: This memorandum was produced by the Office of Strategic Research. Comments and queries regarding it may be directed to Eugene Armstrong, extension 4071.

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4. The Soviets do occasionally conduct naval reconnaissance flights from the Kola Peninsula to the Azores and back, but they use the long-range TU-95 Bear D reconnaissance aircraft. TU-95s have been used for such flights for the past several years and are periodically flown to Conakry, Guinea and Havana, Cuba for extended ocean reconnaissance operations.

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